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ABSTRACT

The needs and capabilities of 4-year-old Head Start children were considered in development of classification and attention training curricula, including: (1) sensory exploration through object manipulation, (2) variety of high-interest materials, (3) change of pace during the lesson, (4) presentation of learning activities as games, (5) relating of new terms to the child's experience and vocabulary, and (6) instructing the child in concept meanings before asking him to follow directions using those concepts. Twenty lessons were developed in classification training, which emphasized labeling, description, likenesses and differences, and categorical grouping of such objects as plastic fruits, toy airplanes, and wearing apparel. A guided discovery method encourages the child to detect and recognize relationships for himself. Attention training lessons used materials such as stimulus shapes, parquetry blocks, and three-dimensional animals. The child learns to observe the characteristics of objects and then select like objects. For attention training, a minimum of verbalization and labeling is used as the child is encouraged to focus on visual stimuli. Head Start teachers have reacted positively to these curricula. (NH)

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CLASSIFICATION AND ATTENTION TRAINING CURRICULA FOR HEAD START CHILDREN*

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Previous training sessions developed by Sigel and Olmsted (1966-67, 1967-68) for kindergarten and first grade children were used as a guide in designing attention and classification training curricula for Head Start children. Some of the lessons planned by Sigel and Olmsted for five and six-year-old children dealt with abstract two dimensional designs which were deemed unsuitable for younger four-year-old children. Consequently, the following list of considerations based on the needs and capabilities of four-year-old Head Start children was formulated and utilized as each lesson was generated.

First, sensory exploration through manipulation of objects increases the child's enjoyment and expands his learning. Concrete objects are more readily dealt with by lower-class children than representations such as pictures or line drawings (Sigel, McBane, 1967).

Second, a wide variety of high-interest materials captivates the child's attention and provides the medium for repetitive experiences in attaining a concept. The child needs a number of opportunities to apply and broaden his skill so that newly acquired information may become more firmly implanted.

Third, a frequent change of pace within each lesson helps maintain a child's interest and attention. By interspersing active participation activities with more passive listening and watching activities, provisions

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are made for the child's need for activity and his short attention span with passive experiences.

Fourth, an activity presented as a game is enjoyable for children and, in addition, provides an opportunity to apply new knowledge. Some children are stimulated to learn a concept or skill so that their participation in a game can be more effective.

Fifth, the child's understanding of the vocabulary used in the lesson presentation is directly related to his responsiveness and degree of learning. New terms or labels are more readily understood when related to previous experience and present vocabulary.

Sixth, knowledge of prerequisite concepts is necessary before the child can follow instructions using these concepts (Gagné, 1965). If a child is asked to group "round" objects and he does not have a clear concept of what "round" is, he will probably be unsuccessful in his attempt to comply.

Classification Training

The classification training emphasizes labeling, describing attributes, designating likenesses and differences, and formulating categorical groupings. A typical lesson from the set of twenty sessions illustrates the steps in lesson development. Two categories, plastic fruit and toy airplanes, are utilized in the lesson in the following sequence. An apple is shown, appropriately labeled, and described through questions such as:

What do you call this?

What color is it?

How is it shaped?

What do you do with it?

What do you do to eat it?

How does it feel when you touch it?

The other pieces of fruit are labeled and described in the same manner.

All six fruits are presented together so that similarities can be identified, such as, all are things to eat, all are labeled fruit, and all are made of plastic. The differences in color, shape and texture are also discussed. A guessing game follows which involves identifying the fruit in a paper bag by using only the sense of touch.

Another game designed to use the newly acquired descriptive information is called "Find Something Like Me." A lemon is laid on the table and the child finds another piece of fruit like the lemon in some way. The banana could be selected as having the same color; the orange could be chosen as having the same texture.

The red and yellow airplanes introduced at this point are labeled, the characteristics described, and the likenesses and differences noted. Four objects - the two airplanes, the lemon and the apple - are presented next for the sorting game. Children form two groups using either color or function as the basis for classifying.

Another category of materials used in several other lessons is wearing apparel including items such as a man's glove, a boy's glove, a red bow tie, a red hat, a watch, a belt, and a shoe. Several groupings can be formed within the category. The man's glove and boy's glove form a group because both are gloves or both are worn on hands. The tie and hat can be grouped by color, and the watch, belt and shoe are all leather items.

The glove and shoe could form another group since both are usually worn in pairs.

Rhythm instruments, another category used, are combined with the wearing apparel items for classification across categories. For example, the drum, bells, tie and hat may be grouped together since the color red is evidenced in all four items.

The seven family members in the Judy Family Story Set provide high-interest manipulative materials which can be classified in two ways. One possibility is grouping the children and the adults; the other is grouping the males and the females.

As new categories are introduced, the child is encouraged to observe and group across the categories in a variety of ways. A guided discovery method is used in training the child to detect and recognize relationships for himself. Verbalization throughout the lesson is encouraged as an integral component of the training procedure.

Attention Training

In attention training, the child first learns to observe the characteristics of objects. After one object is selected as a focal point, the child's task consists of scanning a group of varying objects to find one or several like the example. Visual likenesses and differences are focussed upon as the child makes his selection, but the formulation of categories and groupings are not included in the training. In one attention training lesson, bingo boards and stimulus forms are used to accomplish the objective of differentiating identical and different geometric shapes. First, the shapes are presented one at a time for discussion of the

characteristics. The blue square, for example, has four points and four sides. Then, a stimulus shape, such as the yellow triangle, is shown to the children who locate and cover the identical shape on their boards. The yellow triangle is located in a different position on each board so that visual scanning must be employed rather than merely copying another child's choice of position. If all boards were identical, the child could use the copying technique instead of actively scanning and focusing for himself.

In another lesson, a three-dimensional animal is placed in a small pen made of fencing for the child to observe. The child's task then is to select the animals in the zoo, a larger fenced area, which are identical to the exemplary animal.

In some lessons, a model is constructed as the focus. The child then builds an identical structure or design such as a specified line on a peg board.

Parquetry blocks are sorted by having each child scan the set of blocks to find all blocks which are identical in color and shape to the example. Parquetry blocks are also matched with corresponding shapes on an outlined design sheet to complete the three-dimensional picture.

Two-dimensional materials, like puzzle lotto, are included in some lessons. The puzzle pieces are arranged to form a picture such as a farm animal. One piece of the puzzle is then removed and randomly placed with other puzzle pieces. The child scans the group of puzzle pieces and selects the missing piece to complete the picture appropriately.

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A minimal amount of verbalization and labeling is incorporated in attention training; instead, the child is trained to focus on visual stimuli as appropriate discriminations and identifications of likenesses and differences are made. Praise is used generously for completing a task and for attempting to perform each task. When a task is not completed accurately, the teacher helps the child discover his mistake so he can correct his own work.

The classification and attention training curricula as developed for and implemented in Head Start classrooms, have received positive, enthusiastic reactions from classroom teachers. The teachers felt a need for some structure and supplemental purposeful activities. Teachers' responses to the lessons have reinforced the importance of the basic considerations utilized in the curricula development. The wide variety of appropriate high-interest manipulative materials and the diversity of gamelike approaches are keys to maintaining the preschool child's attentiveness. Cognizance of prerequisite concepts and comprehensible vocabulary are essential ingredients in the development of curricula designed to modify the young child's cognitive development.

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